

Briefs

Field Crops

U.S. Soybean Acreage Increases For Ninth Consecutive Year

Planted area for the eight major U.S. field crops (corn, soybeans, wheat, barley, sorghum, oats, cotton, and rice) totals 251.8 million acres in 1999, down more than 4 million acres from last year when prices were higher for most crops at planting time. Declines in wheat and feed-grains more than offset gains in soybeans, cotton, and rice.

Estimates of planted and harvested acreage in USDA's *Acreage* report were based on surveys conducted during the first 2 weeks of June, while the March 31 USDA *Prospective Plantings* report indicated farmers' crop intentions for spring plantings in 1999. Compared with the *Prospective Plantings* report, planted area is nearly 2 percent higher for soybeans but 1 percent lower for corn. Total wheat area is essentially the same.

Harvested acreage and actual yield will be strongly influenced by weather conditions through the growing season. Normal weather would result in large output and stable or declining farm prices for most U.S. field crops in 1999/2000 compared with a year earlier (see *AO* June-July 1999). However, crop potential could be reduced in the Atlantic Coastal Plains and eastern Gulf Coast if current dry weather persists in the region.

U.S. farmers have planted 74.2 million acres of *soybeans* in 1999, a 3-percent increase over last year's record acreage. Planted acreage has steadily increased since 1990 when the soybean planted area totaled 57.8 million acres. Farmers are expected to harvest 73.3 million acres, up 4 percent from the 1998 record harvested acreage. Several factors are behind the rise in soybean plantings, including a soybean loan rate (under the government nonrecourse marketing assistance loan and loan deficiency payment program) that is favorable relative to other crops (*AO* May 1999).

For the second consecutive year, estimated soybean acreage increased in the Corn Belt and the Great Plains and declined in

most of the South, Southeast, and mid-Atlantic states. The largest acreage increases were in Nebraska, South Dakota, Missouri, and Ohio. Farmers in the largest producing states, Iowa and Illinois, also increased soybean area this spring. States with the largest reductions in plantings included Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, and Texas.

In most of the western Corn Belt and Great Plains states, heavy and continuing storms during May kept producers from an early start in planting soybeans. More favorable and drier weather in the eastern Corn Belt and the southern U.S. allowed soybeans to be planted at a rapid pace. Despite some

early delays, planting progress for the 1999 U.S. crop had advanced ahead of a year ago by the first week of June.

The increased soybean acreage has replaced some area formerly devoted to *corn*. Corn plantings declined in 1999 to an estimated 77.6 million acres, down 3 percent from last year. Corn acreage to be harvested for grain is estimated to decrease to 71 million acres, down 2 percent from 1998. Total corn acreage for Corn Belt states, at 51.4 million acres, declined 2 percent from last year, due in part to increased soybean plantings (*AO* May 1999). Illinois and Indiana were the only two major states to show an increase in total planted acreage from last year.

Outside the Corn Belt, in Texas, Louisiana, and South Dakota, acreage decreased sharply from last year's high levels. Although rains soaked parts of the central and southern Great Plains and western Corn Belt in late April, weather

U.S. Field Crops—Market Outlook

	Area			Yield	Production	Total Domestic supply	Exports	Ending stocks	Farm price
	Planted	Harvested							
	— Million acres —		Bu/acre	— Million bu —				\$/bu	
Wheat									
1998/99	65.9	59.0	43.2	2,550	3,373	1,378	1,050	945	2.65
1999/2000	62.9	54.6	42.7	2,333	3,378	1,315	1,150	913	2.45-2.95
Corn									
1998/99	80.2	72.6	134.4	9,761	11,089	7,420	1,925	1,774	1.95
1999/2000	77.6	71.0	135.8	9,650	11,404	7,485	1,925	1,994	1.65-2.05
Sorghum									
1998/99	9.6	7.7	67.3	520	569	315	190	64	1.70
1999/2000	9.0	8.3	69.0	573	637	370	200	67	1.35-1.75
Barley									
1998/99	6.3	5.9	60.1	352	502	331	30	141	1.95
1999/2000	5.2	4.9	60.3	295	471	307	30	134	1.60-2.00
Oats									
1998/99	4.9	2.8	60.4	167	346	263	2	81	1.15
1999/2000	4.7	2.6	61.1	161	343	261	2	80	0.90-1.30
Soybeans									
1998/99	72.4	70.8	38.9	2,757	2,961	1,781	785	395	5.00
1999/2000	74.2	73.3	40.0	2,935	3,334	1,814	930	595	3.90-4.70
			Lbs./acre	— Million cwt (rough equiv.) —					\$/cwt
Rice									
1998/99	3.35	3.32	5,669	188.1	225.7	109.8	85	30.9	8.70-8.80
1999/2000	3.60	3.58	5,902	211.0	252.2	112.6	84	55.6	5.50-6.50
			Lbs./acre	— Million bales —					¢/lb.
Cotton									
1998/99	13.39	10.68	625	13.9	18.2	10.5	4.1	3.6	61.1
1999/2000	14.56	13.5	665	18.7	22.4	10.6	5.7	6.0	*

Based on July 12, 1999 *World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates*.

*USDA is prohibited from publishing cotton price projections.

Economic Research Service, USDA

improved in early May, and by the end of the month 96 percent of the U.S. corn crop had been planted. USDA reported that 76 percent of the crop was in good or excellent condition as of July 4.

Sorghum plantings dropped again in 1999 to an estimated 9 million acres, down 6 percent from 1998, as acreage declined in most of the major producing states due to weak feedgrain prices. This is the lowest planted acreage since 1929. Texas, with 2.85 million acres, has the largest reduction, decreasing 20 percent from 1998. Kansas, the largest sorghum producing state, increased plantings 3 percent to 3.6 million acres.

Barley plantings also declined in 1999 to an estimated 5.24 million acres, the lowest on record. The largest declines are in North Dakota and Minnesota as farmers continue to shift away from barley to alternative crops with higher returns such as wheat, soybeans, and other oilseeds. Most of the 1999 barley crop was planted late because of a wet May.

Total **wheat** planted acreage for 1999 is estimated at 62.9 million acres, down 5 percent from last year. It is the lowest planted area since 1973, and area harvested for grain is the lowest since 1988. Relatively unfavorable returns encouraged producers to plant alternative crops such as soybeans and other crops or leave land fallow (see the *Commodity Spotlight* in this issue for more on the wheat outlook).

Cotton plantings for 1999 are estimated at 14.6 million acres, 9 percent above 1998 and 5 percent above the March *Prospective Plantings* report. All major producing states except Arizona and California increased 1999 cotton area. Although planting-time prices were down from a year earlier, expected returns were higher for cotton than for competing crops such as corn and soybeans.

Planting in the southeastern states started slowly due to a severely dry spring, and a majority of the crop was planted during late May and is progressing normally. However, portions of the crops in Georgia and North Carolina are still stressed from dry conditions that persisted during late May and early June. Delta producers completed plantings by June 1, with the crop developing near or ahead of normal.

Acreage Up for Soybeans, Down for Corn

	1998 acreage			1999 acreage		
	Prospective	Planted	Harvested	Prospective	Planted	Harvested
	<i>Million acres</i>					
Corn	80.8	80.2	72.6	78.2	77.6	71.0
Soybeans	72.0	72.4	70.8	73.1	74.2	73.3
Wheat	67.0	65.9	59.0	63.0	62.9	54.6
Sorghum	9.0	9.6	7.7	8.8	9.0	8.3
Barley	6.8	6.3	5.9	5.3	5.2	4.9
Oats	5.2	4.9	2.8	4.7	4.7	2.6
Rice	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6
Cotton	13.2	13.4	10.7	13.9	14.6	NA
Total	257.1	256.0	233.1	250.6	251.8	NA

1999 harvested acreage forecast.

NA = Not available. The June *Acreage* report does not estimate cotton harvested acreage.

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Crop conditions continue to be mostly good or excellent in all the Delta states.

Texas, the largest cotton producing state, completed most plantings by mid-June, although some replanting was necessary in the Texas High Plains on fields damaged by hail and high winds. At the end of June, 40 percent of the crop was rated in good or excellent condition, and 29 percent was rated in fair condition. In California, low temperatures and damp weather in early April kept plantings behind normal. However, warm temperatures during the second half of June provided good growing conditions. At the end of June, 60 percent of the California crop was rated in good condition. Prospects for a large U.S. crop led to a fall in cotton prices from May to June.

Rice plantings for 1999 are estimated at 3.6 million acres, up 3 percent from 1998, with long grain acreage up 4 percent from last year. Acreage was up from 1998 in all major producing states except California. Relative returns were higher than for competing crops (e.g., soybeans) when farmers made planting decisions in February and March. **AO**

Robert A. Skinner (202) 694-5313
rskinner@econ.ag.gov

For further information, contact:

Mack Leath, domestic wheat; Ed Allen, world wheat and feed grains; Allen Baker, domestic feed grains; Nathan Childs, rice; Mark Ash, oilseeds; Steve MacDonald, world cotton; Les Meyer, domestic cotton. All are at (202) 694-5300.

August Releases—USDA's Agricultural Statistics Board

The following reports are issued electronically at 3 pm (ET) unless otherwise indicated.

August

- 2 *Crop Progress* (4 p.m.)
- 3 *Egg Products*
- 4 *Broiler Hatchery*
- 5 *Dairy Products*
Poultry Slaughter
Basic Formula Milk Price
(*Wisconsin State Report*)
- 6 *Dairy Products Prices* (8:30 a.m.)
- 9 *Crop Progress* (4 p.m.)
- 11 *Broiler Hatchery*
- 12 *Cotton Ginnings* (8:30 a.m.)
Crop Production (8:30 a.m.)
- 13 *Dairy Products Prices* (8:30 a.m.)
Turkey Hatchery
- 16 *Milk Production*
Crop Progress (4 p.m.)
- 17 *Cranberries* (1 p.m.)
- 18 *Broiler Hatchery*
Mushrooms
- 19 *Catfish Processing*
Citrus Fruits—Final Estimates
1992-97
Potatoes and Sweet Potatoes—
Final Estimates 1992-97
- 20 *Dairy Products Prices* (8:30 a.m.)
Cattle on Feed
Cold Storage
Farm Labor
Livestock Slaughter
- 23 *Crop Progress* (4 p.m.)
NASS Facts Newsletter (4 p.m.)
- 24 *Chickens and Eggs*
- 25 *Broiler Hatchery*
- 26 *Turkeys*
- 27 *Dairy Products Prices* (8:30 a.m.)
Rice Stocks (8:30 a.m.)
Peanut Stocks and Processing
- 30 *Crop Progress* (4 p.m.)
- 31 *Agricultural Prices*